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Expert Workshop on Ways and Means to Enhance Social Protection and Reduce Vulnerability

Note by the Secretary-General

1. In its resolution 1996/7, the Economic and Social Council decided on the substantive items of the agenda for the Commission for Social Development at its future sessions and a multi-year programme of work for the consideration of priority subjects. The Commission discussed the eradication of poverty at its special session in 1996; it considered productive employment and sustainable livelihoods at its thirty-fifth regular session in 1997. At its thirty-sixth session in 1998, the Commission will give attention to promoting social integration and the participation of all people, including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons, with consideration of the following specific topics:

(a) Promoting social integration through responsive government, full participation in society, non-discrimination, tolerance, equality and social justice;

(b) Enhancing social protection, reducing vulnerability and enhancing employment opportunities for groups with specific needs;

(c) Violence, crime and the problem of illicit drugs and substance abuse as factors of social disintegration.

2. In its resolution 1995/60, the Council decided that the Commission for Social Development should establish the practice of opening its debates to experts and the main actors of civil society so as to enhance knowledge and understanding of social development and the exchange of information and experience. Further, in its resolution 1996/7, the Council reaffirmed the need for ensuring an effective partnership and cooperation between Governments and the relevant actors of civil society, the social partners and the major groups as defined in Agenda 21,[1] including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, in the implementation of and follow-up to the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of

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Action, and for ensuring their involvement in the planning, elaboration, implementation and evaluation of social policies at the national level.

3. Accordingly, in preparing for the thirty-sixth session of the Commission for Social Development and in response to the expressed intentions of the Economic and Social Council, the United Nations Secretariat organized an expert workshop on ways and means to enhance social protection and reduce vulnerability, held at United Nations Headquarters from 10 to 14 November 1997. The workshop brought together experts from all world regions and observers from the United Nations system and civil society.

4. The report of the workshop is annexed below.

Notes

[1] In addition to the social partners (representatives of trade unions and of business and industry), the other major groups identified in Agenda 21 are women, children and youth, indigenous people, non-governmental organizations, local authorities, the scientific and technological community, and farmers.

Annex

Report of the Expert Workshop on Ways and Means to Enhance Social Protection and Reduce Vulnerability, United Nations Headquarters, 10-14 November 1997

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I. Concepts and definitions

1. Enhancing social protection and reducing vulnerability are important goals of the World Summit for Social Development, which recommended a rich menu of activities to advance those goals. The actions that are proposed and the terminology used, however, are not always free from ambiguity. Some clarification of terminology and concepts would facilitate discussion and agreement on what issues need priority attention in specific local and national situations. One key concept that is subject to different interpretations is "vulnerability", particularly in relation to another important concept, "disadvantage".

A. What is vulnerability?

2. Vulnerability is a part of the human condition; some might say it is our vulnerabilities that make us human. No one is without vulnerability, and even those who live in physical and material security live in fear of what might afflict them or those closest to them. There are degrees of vulnerability and specific circumstances of it, which need to be addressed.

3. A condition that afflicts the species is difficult to legislate for in specific policy terms. Trying to rid the world of vulnerability might be considered the social equivalent of eugenics. But while few would support eugenics, even fewer would argue that we should not use medical science to rid the world of the great scourges to physical health. Similarly, the fact that it is our vulnerabilities that make us human should not prevent us focusing on the avoidable — often socially constructed — consequences of vulnerability. We need to create societies in which the concept of vulnerability is understood, in which the experience of vulnerability is respected, and in which the consequences of vulnerability are cushioned by communal understanding and relevant action.

4. In every society — regardless of geography, social structure, or political and economic system — people are exposed to a wide variety of risks. Some of those risks may result from acts of nature, whereas others are caused by human action.

5. Risks in any society are not evenly distributed among the general population; hence people are not equally exposed. Certain individuals and groups have a much higher exposure to risk than others, because of socio-demographic characteristics, economic status, physical or mental condition, lifestyle, and so forth. Vulnerability is a state of high exposure to certain risks, combined with reduced ability to protect or to defend oneself against those risks and to cope with the negative consequences that ensue when the risks occur.

6. The degree of exposure to risks and the ability to cope with their negative consequences do not remain constant throughout the life span but vary from one stage of life to another. Also, types of risk can change according to situations and circumstances. Therefore, vulnerability is a dynamic and relative concept, varying over time and across space.

7. Since vulnerability stems from numerous sources, certain individuals and groups can suffer from multiple or cumulative vulnerabilities. Thus, one may distinguish between, for example, ecological vulnerability (living in high-risk areas); structural (including status) vulnerability (arising from such attributes as sex, race, occupation, or social class); and role vulnerability (stemming from relationships from which the individual cannot readily or easily withdraw, such as marriage and tenancy).

8. Vulnerability, then, is rarely a one-dimensional condition. At least three dimensions of vulnerability have been identified:

(a) Risk dimension, considered in terms of a greater risk or probability of victimization and implying that those who are vulnerable have a greater likelihood of being victimized than others;

(b) State of mind dimension, rendering those who are vulnerable more afraid of victimization and its consequences than those who are not vulnerable;

(c) Impact dimension, considered in terms of the impact victimization is likely to have on the victim, in the sense that the greater the vulnerability, the stronger and more serious the impact.

9. Although vulnerability and disadvantage are often used as if they were interchangeable, they are distinct. By "disadvantaged", we refer to all groups that encounter structural obstacles (i.e., obstacles created by society) to access to resources, benefits and opportunities. Those obstacles derive from the relationships of power which exist in all societies and the relative value which society gives to each group. The effects for any one group may differ depending on the societal context, but the result in all cases is increased vulnerability to poverty, oppression and exploitation. They can also compound other vulnerabilities, where they exist. The structural causes that underlie disadvantage include race, ethnicity, gender, religion, indigenous or national origin, and socio-economic status.

10. An exclusive focus on economic status as a means of judging disadvantage is outdated. While it is true that persons or groups who are vulnerable are also frequently disadvantaged and are often particularly vulnerable because they are disadvantaged, many may be vulnerable in the absence of any economic disadvantage. For example, prosperous immigrants, wealthy older persons, successful women, though not economically disadvantaged, may be vulnerable to various forms of victimization, discrimination, or exploitation.

B. Why does vulnerability matter?

11. It is important to the well-being and cohesion of society to take measures to protect all its members from the risks they face at different stages in life and to overcome the disadvantages that they confront because of gender-based assumptions or by reason of their membership in a particular race, class or group. When individuals are forced by circumstance to become a burden on their families and communities, the loss to society is obvious. When individuals cannot reach their full potential, it is not only they who lose; society loses also. Both individuals and society are strengthened when all people contribute to their maximum potential. But, ultimately, any society must be judged by its attitude to those in situations of greatest vulnerability and by the barriers it erects which prevent individuals and groups from participating fully in the life of the community.

12. Social justice requires the institution of remedies to eliminate all forms of disadvantage. Social harmony, maximizing everyone's potential, requires the development of policies, measures and means to reduce vulnerability and to enhance the protection of those who are vulnerable.

C. Who is vulnerable?

13. Vulnerability can be linked to specific stages in the life span, involving risks intrinsic to different periods of life. The concept of risk which is associated with vulnerability implies susceptibility by an individual to biological, psychological and social factors, and a high probability that those will cause problems in different life circumstances. It follows that this vulnerability, if not counteracted, could hinder personal development and lead to the creation of disadvantage for the individual with regard to his or her current environment and future prospects.

14. Although it is difficult to define exactly which age limits separate one period of life from another, for the purpose of this report, certain identifiable periods bring particular risks: pre-natal period; birth and peri-natal; infancy; childhood; adolescence and youth; adulthood; and old age.

15. Pre-natal risks mainly result from the knowledge, situation and conditions of parents, and particularly relate to the health of mothers, their nutrition and the habits they follow during pregnancy.

16. At birth, human beings experience one of the most critical periods of life. Careful treatment of the mother and the child during this period is essential for preventing several disabilities. During the peri-natal period, a nurturing environment is essential. Also, early screening and intervention can reduce risks or compensate deficient conditions, thus helping to prevent the onset of disease or disability. Infancy is an extremely critical period, when physical, emotional and cognitive developments are imprinted. Lack of stimulation, lack of affection, poor nutrition, abandonment, abuse or neglect are serious risk factors which can lead to stunted development and irreversible future disadvantage.

17. Children are prone to various internal and external sources of stress, with the age of three years being considered a particularly critical time. Children in different situations of risk may be distinguished, including children left in institutions or abandoned or children fending for themselves in the streets. Although such children are often born to families of lower socio-economic status, the risks relating to physical and mental abuse of children, and some kinds of abandonment or neglect, can be found in families at all socio-economic levels.

18. Adolescence can be a turning point in life, when decisions and actions taken can have profound implications for the future. During this period of life, risks include insecurity resulting from family disintegration; lack of sufficient frameworks for establishing self-identity or points of reference; lack of access to good health and educational services; and self-imposed risks connected with experimentation with alcohol or drugs. Peer pressure and the need for acceptance may take on exaggerated importance and affect decision-making regarding behaviour and shaping intergenerational relationships. Unwanted pregnancy and prostitution are among other major risks to which this age group is exposed.

19. Many risks come with adulthood, as people prepare to form households and take on family and other responsibilities, including work. Difficulties in obtaining

adequate housing and employment and family violence are common or prevalent risks.

20. Old age can bring significant risks such as declining health, abandonment by the family, institutionalization, alienation and the loss of a meaningful social role. Even in countries where older persons have traditionally enjoyed great respect and influence, many older persons now face situations in which their families do not have the housing and economic resources to take care of them.

21. Combining any of these age-related vulnerabilities with other conditions, such as disability or membership in a minority group, can result in an accumulation of risks, which can, in turn, lead to greater discrimination and segregation. The accumulation of risks has implications which go far beyond what the policies aiming to counter any single vulnerability are designed to handle. Likewise, poverty or difficulties brought on by economic transition or adjustment, when combined with the age-related vulnerabilities, may further magnify the risks people confront, because they reduce the options at their command, which may then compound their vulnerability.

22. Women and various social groups suffer structural disadvantage resulting from the nature of the societies in which they live, which have compounded vulnerabilities by hindering or denying them access to resources, benefits and opportunities, and minimized their capacities to achieve sustainable livelihoods. Because gender-based roles and responsibilities continue to proscribe their choices in most places, women are particularly at risk and deserve particular attention. In addition, social groups which can be identified include: ethnic and religious minorities; indigenous people; refugees and displaced persons; migrants and migrant workers, both legal and illegal, and family members left behind; prisoners and ex-offenders; addicts and former addicts; squatters; street children; people living in extreme poverty; and landless rural workers.

23. Moreover, people in vulnerable situations run a very high risk of becoming victims of various kinds of violence, both within and outside the family. Violence affects women, children, disabled persons, older persons and others.

24. Not only can individuals and groups be vulnerable, but communities — and indeed countries — can be considered vulnerable as well. Those communities usually experience adverse structural conditions which create a high degree of vulnerability for their members. The economic difficulties faced by a community or a country may also be coupled with a low level of public resources and consequently low social transfers which aggravate the economic vulnerability. Economic vulnerability in a community is produced by a combination of factors, some of which may be briefly stated:

(a) Few opportunities for employment, resulting in work capacities that cannot find productive use and therefore cannot generate sufficient incomes;

(b) Low incomes derived from the work that is available, because of low productivity or the nature of the economic environment. This results in a bad "exchange rate" between work and income and results in cases where even strenuous work for long periods cannot produce a minimum level of income;

(c) Low levels of public transfers of resources to particular members of the community and to the community as a whole. It may be that the social security system does not offer minimum coverage for those at risk, or that unemployment benefits, pensions, social benefits, and child and family allowances are insufficient to meet people's needs;

(d) Public investment for infrastructure is low, threatening the community's social and economic life and contacts with the outside world;

(e) An inability within the community to mobilize its internal resources (including the work force and natural resources) to overcome the structural economic problems;

(f) Scarce natural resources or an inability to use available resources efficiently;

(g) Outdated education or training and professional skills which, when accumulated at the level of the community, result in a lack of initiative and economic imagination.

25. Economic vulnerability at the community level may result in internal social and ethnic conflicts which can further reduce prospects for development. Generally, a low degree of community integration and cooperation makes an already negative condition worse. Economically vulnerable communities may be found in all countries, although they are more prevalent in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

II. Causes and consequences

26. The interconnection of world history, politics and economics renders some regions and countries structurally disadvantaged, placing their populations at greater risk of vulnerability to forces such as globalization, market liberalization and cultural imperialism

27. There is a continued perception that economic measures — such as technological advance, industrialization and modernization — represent progress, in spite of the massive social costs, including disorientation, alienation and destruction of the traditional social and cultural fabric, that they have caused and that have given rise to wide-scale displacement. Many places have witnessed the weakening, if not outright eradication, of the cultural base, which has stripped individuals and groups of traditional social safety nets and networks, leaving them exposed to exploitation. Jobs have been created at the expense of labour rights; the marginalization of women has led to the feminization of poverty; the imposition of hierarchical structures that pit indigenous peoples against each other has created a "fourth world" within some societies. The quest for work has forced workers to leave their homes and families to seek employment in foreign and sometimes hostile environments. The explosion of violent crime has forced most countries to spend more money on imprisoning criminals than establishing preventive measures by contributing to their social and economic development. Perhaps the greatest irony of all is the extraordinary sums invested in crime-fighting strategies and in the social rehabilitation of addicts and offenders, while the drug trade becomes entrenched in the highest and most acceptable levels of international business.

28. Many have argued that the inequity inherent in the current prevailing model of development has been the main cause of the social, economic and cultural degradation experienced in so many societies and is the cause of the increasing vulnerability of many social groups. They perceive a structural vulnerability that Governments — intentionally or not — impose on disadvantaged groups who do not require a doctorate in economics to know that poverty has increased and standards of living have declined. Ethnocentric and dominating models of development have shaped development institutions to the detriment of developing-country realities. Development, as practised, has fostered a way of conceiving social life as a technical problem, as a matter of rational decision and management to be entrusted to that group of people — the development professionals — whose specialized knowledge allegedly qualifies them for the task. Change was thus not seen as a process rooted in the interpretation of each society's history and cultural tradition. Development professionals sought to devise mechanisms and procedures to make societies fit a pre-existing model that embodied the structures and functions of modernity. The argument is that developing countries are perceived so completely through Western forms of knowledge and power that many of their citizens have begun to accept and absorb the label of "underdeveloped", which carries the sense of being ignorant and hopeless, and invalidates indigenous culture and strategies as means for citizens to solve their own challenges.

29. The separation of economic conditions from their social and cultural contexts prevents the achievement of a holistic conceptualization of development. It sidelines and undermines social and cultural traditions which undergird societal values and attitudes, and affects legislation and policies. Reliance on economics and econometric glimpses of societal distress continues to produce intimidating graphs and charts, without putting the flesh and the faces behind those charts and graphs. It masks, too, the level of human suffering caused by inappropriate policies and disjointed programmes. The social and cultural dimensions of vulnerability are critical to the fulfilment of the basic human rights of individuals and populations. For example, attitudes, prejudices, policies, legislation and professional and institutional practices that prevent full inclusion, integration and participation in society result in higher degrees of discrimination which further aggravate individual and collective vulnerability.

30. The exclusion of individuals or groups reduces the investment of human capital and robs society of certain knowledge, experience, perceptions and solutions which might widen creative capacities and provide fresh solutions to societal challenges. In addition, it nurtures societal paranoia, fragmentation, distrust and threats to personal, community and national security and well-being. Moreover, it threatens the basic fundamental rights to life, development and full and inclusive participation and social integration. For example, the exclusion of women and people with disabilities not only prohibits their participation but also denies society of the full and rich contribution of diverse experiences. Additionally, the denial to children and youth of relevant and appropriate education stunts the creative growth and development of an important segment of society and places desired long-term goals and an efficient renewal of societies at risk.

III. Policies and programmes

A. Diversity and universality

31. The Workshop recognized early in its deliberations the variety of situations that exist in different countries and hence the inadvisability of discussing detailed or country-specific solutions to the problems of vulnerability, except as examples. Therefore, a number of general principles

which are of global or very wide relevance were the main focus of the discussions.

32. One such principle is that the notion of development must be broader than merely economic. The purpose of development should not be only to increase per capita GDP but to do so while directly improving social conditions, including reducing vulnerability and its consequences and promoting social justice. In other words, the goal of development policy must be human-centred, placing economies at the service of human beings, and not the reverse, in order to achieve societies which value and protect human dignity and which promote sustainable development.

33. While the direct experience of poverty might be specific to particular circumstances, places and periods of time, its overall consequences and effects are universal. When one person is condemned to live in poverty, all people are at risk. Therefore, while programmes to combat vulnerability might be situational, the definition and the general analysis are universal. There are networking possibilities and strengths in accepting the universality of vulnerability.

B. Strategic principles

1. The human rights approach

34. An inclusive society can be promoted through the development and implementation of policies that promote social integration on the basis of a certain social framework which may be called a human rights or inclusion framework. It is also a society that respects the rights of its people to life, to development and to full participation.

35. The human rights approach is coming to be recognized as the standard of legitimacy for political systems and as an instrument for shaping public policies. Inclusion implies that policies, programmes and social services should be organized, planned, developed or adapted in a way that makes possible the full development of all citizens in a context of freedom, independence and full access to basic services. Moreover, services should be less fragmented and segregated (that is, universal), based in the community and allowing for the participation of people in the decision-making that affects their lives.

Values framework

36. A values framework involves a set of values and strategic principles that focus attention on the essentials affecting populations: respect for the right to life and development; respect for the value of health, education and social protection; respect for the value of human differences and diversity; respect for personal and cultural identities, within a context that reflects universal standards of well-being; the value of ethics, both for individuals and within professional and institutional settings; the value of solidarity; the value of networks that provide support to individuals, such as families or community organizations; the value of indigenous knowledge and experiences.

Principles

37. The strategic principles are the following:

(a) The social well-being of citizens should be a country's concern and not only the concern of the Government of the day: priorities and policies should be designed and implemented to cover periods beyond the life of a particular Government or administration;

(b) Policies should focus on the best interests of the people as subjects and not objects of rights, while putting this interest above any cost-benefit consideration or particular sectional interest;

(c) Policies should aim to strengthen networks and organizations in the community, recognizing the essential support they can provide;

(d) A global vision should guide social policy action, even at the local level (based on the motto, "Global vision/local action");

(e) Interdependency is stressed, giving particular value to the interrelationship, articulation and coordination of three actors in society: the Government, the private sector, and the civil society, or voluntary sector;

(f) Organizations of civil society, especially at the community level, should be actively involved in the design and implementation of policies, and in their monitoring and evaluation.

38. Implementing this framework involves creating policy-making groups composed of governmental officials, independent professionals, representatives of organizations of civil society, members of the private sector and representatives of intergovernmental organizations who will participate in the identification of needs and problems, in the determination of priorities, strategies and actions, and in their implementation and evaluation. The focus is on developing community-based, decentralized strategies that allow for the participation of different actors of society. They become partners and grow and work together to achieve outcomes that balance the needs and responsibilities of different groups, within a framework of human rights and

inclusion. Each actor will have different roles and responsibilities in the different phases of the process.

39. Voluntary organizations and the social organization of community members and families can best represent their own needs and interests. Governments have responsibility for overall policy and for achieving balance among different interests; professionals provide the technical know-how; the private sector is responsible for providing resources and space for the development of people. To be successful the process relies on recognition, mutual respect and wisdom, and rules that reinforce the need for balance in a system of which they all form part.

40. One risk connected with this process is the danger that one or more of the actors will not respect the "rules of the game". Another risk derives from the speed at which the process progresses: when it is too quick, codes or cultural realities may be disrupted without allowing time for the necessary process of transition and understanding. Finally, there is a danger that institutional or corporate interests may take precedence over the interests of persons whom they are supposed to serve.

2. Principles for community-level coping strategies

41. As countries have sought, or been driven, to integrate more closely into the global, market-based economy, various local or community-level developments have eased what has for many been a difficult and disruptive transition. With the realization that for many countries a successful integration into the global economy will take much longer than earlier believed, more attention is being given to measures at the community level to produce the means of life through non-market mechanisms. That means basically two things:

(a) Improving the capacities of people to use their own labour and natural resources to produce, directly for their own consumption, a portion of the goods and services they need. Many communities are made vulnerable by a sudden change in their traditional life strategies, and they have to be helped to develop new strategies to cope with change and to decide how to react — through action, resistance or adjustment — to the new environment. This very often involves not an individual but a collective learning process. Very often, opportunities for income-generating activities are invoked, but there are other, non-market welfare-generating activities that should also be considered. Small-scale local resources, not at all interesting for market activity, could, with additional support, contribute to sustainable livelihoods;

(b) Improving people's capacities, through community action, to build economic and social infrastructure (roads, irrigation systems, schools) and to empower the community to avoid social conflicts and exploitation. Community-based development requires a much better use of scarce resources available through transfers from the central Government. By adding their own resources, communities can increase significantly the productive impact of those transfers. Community works and public works are thus not only means for creating jobs but also means for enhancing community empowerment and welfare.

42. In this framework, development of the private sector is seen in a more diversified way: alongside the classic private employer, other arrangements could contribute to the economic development of communities, including self-employment, cooperatives and employee-owned firms. The so-called "third sector" is seen not only as something apart from the economy but also as an important factor for economic regeneration.

43. Community-level development also has to be considered as part of an evolution of local government, making it more transparent, more participative, more accountable.

3. An integrated, or comprehensive, approach

44. In formulating policies, attention should be given not only to preparing individuals to cope with and function in society and to participate more fully in the social and economic development of the country but also to making the economic, social and physical environment friendlier to those with specific and special needs. Brief examples of how this principle applies to three groups — people with disabilities, women and young people — are given below.

45. The integration of the disabled in the work place cannot be accomplished simply by providing appropriate training for existing jobs unless the training is accompanied by measures that make the work place accessible and operational for the disabled, and that show employers the advantages of hiring disabled workers.

46. In order to facilitate the entry of women into the labour market, it may not be sufficient to train them for available jobs; in some instances it may be necessary to adapt working conditions to the needs of working mothers, by the adoption, *inter alia*, at the national level, of legislation encouraging the establishment of return-to-work schemes and the adaptation of the job conditions to the needs of the family. (Job-sharing and flexible hours are steps in that direction.) Research on how best to implement such schemes should be encouraged by all concerned.

47. In most countries, young people experience unemployment at a rate from two to four times greater than the national average. One reason for the very high differentials is that new entrants to the labour force have greater difficulty locating jobs in their fields of competence than people already in the work force. In order to reduce the differential, therefore, it is necessary, first, to develop a job market, through public and private employment services and other means of informing young entrants to the labour force about available work opportunities. Secondly, there may be a need to adjust the educational system to the economic needs of the market to make the type of education provided relevant to existing demands for labour. This can be done most appropriately through a human resources planning exercise in which supply and demand for labour are estimated for some years in the future.

48. Finally, policies and programmes should be formulated that encourage youth to enter self-employment and to exercise their entrepreneurial talents. Entering self-employment not only reduces unemployment but can also create additional jobs which are more likely to be filled by other young people. Measures to encourage and sustain youth self-employment may include management training, mentoring, and the establishment of credit facilities and liberal laws and procedures conducive to the formation of small businesses.

49. Because of their particular vulnerability and because they are at a stage in life when future intellectual, emotional and social skills are developing, there is a clear need to enhance and protect the rights of children to a sustainable life and development and to reduce their exposure to circumstances that can lead to physical, social or environmental risk. Societies should not just protect children, however; they should also offer children opportunities to express and contribute their unique perspectives of the world. Children can make important contributions to the societies in which they live. They represent a tremendous potential resource of hope for creative thinking and problem-solving, largely unencumbered by cynicism or preconceptions.

4. Entrenched vulnerable ethnic groups

50. The marginalization and exclusion of certain racial and ethnic groups is not always the result of discrimination and segregation alone. Sometimes it is combined with economic, social and cultural vulnerability. The situation of gypsies, as of many indigenous people, is a common example. It is important for societies to improve their capacity to understand the types of vulnerability that can arise from ethnic differences and to enhance their support in an appropriate manner.

51. In the past, emphasis was given to encouraging the acceptance of diversity, including respect and support for cultural differences. This is a crucial starting principle, but it is no longer sufficient. In a world of interdependence, dominated by rapid change in many conditions of life, some groups could be pushed into chronic crisis by trying to maintain their traditional life strategies. Such groups should be supported in developing their capacities to adapt to the changed environment while maintaining their cultural integrity, to be open to self-development, to take control of their own lives and to interact positively with people outside their group, thus empowering them and enabling them to build their own future in a continuously changing environment.

5. The role of civil society or the "third sector"

52. The State, the private sector and the third sector (civil society) provide the three legs for the construction of a society for all. It is necessary to implement policies that create synergy among the three sectors for addressing human needs. Decreasing the vulnerability of human beings can become a common objective of the three sectors.

53. Organizations of civil society have the singular characteristic of being privately conducted but having a public purpose. More and more people are discovering that they can work directly for the construction of a better society.

54. An objective of efforts to strengthen civil society and its organizations is to give them an identity, as a "sector" or movement, active in shaping the future of society. In this way, organizations of civil society can act to balance the power of the other two sectors — the State and the private sectors. To fortify organizations of civil society means to strengthen the roots of a democratic society. Citizens discovered long ago that it is not necessary to wait for the State to solve social problems. Working through organizations, citizens can take action into their own hands. But in many countries, until recently, they felt isolated and without an identity. Many leaders of civil society were surprised to learn that their organizations belonged to a broad social movement.

55. There are already situations in society that bring the three sectors together into win/win situations. For instance, violence makes everybody vulnerable; partnerships of the State, the private sector and civil society have proved effective in some countries in decreasing violence.

56. In order to build a society for all, actors in the three sectors have to recognize the potential to achieve a win/win situation. To do so, they must depend on one another. Governments all over the world are embarking on efforts to redefine or reinvent their role in ensuring human well-being. Many have focused on their role in designing policy initiatives rather than delivering services. Often, they come to depend on organizations of civil society to reach communities, to deliver services and to increase credibility within the population: those organizations know better than anyone else what the needs of local populations are.

57. The private sector, encouraged by a more "consumer-driven" marketplace, is beginning to shift from a mentality of "business for business sake" to one that seriously considers and integrates issues of business ethics and codes of conduct into decision-making and dealings. The private sector needs the development of communities to expand markets for its products, and the third sector can help greatly in this task. At the same time, as new technologies eliminate jobs, there is a danger that consumer buying power will be diminished. While large private-sector employers and the Government are reducing their work forces everywhere, the organizations of civil society are hiring people. To overcome the contradiction between that explosion and the decrease in consumption (because of unemployment), it is necessary to promote the growth of markets elsewhere. Thus, the third sector has an important economic role in modern societies in terms of the amount of resources it can mobilize and of the employment it generates.

58. If competition prevails in the private sector — encouraging productivity but also egotistic behaviour — and if corruption is a sin in government, the third sector offers to all the opportunity to become more humane. It extends an opportunity to all to work to improve the lives of others and thus to be able to show empathy and compassion, qualities that do not belong to the world ruled by market laws and that are all too rarely found among the rules of government. If the competitive rationale of the market economy and the bureaucratic rules of governmental institutions bar people from working with their hearts, it is in the third sector that their hearts can function. This feeds people with good feelings, which may be one explanation for the fact that so many business people are becoming involved directly in voluntary work in social organizations.

59. However, the organizations of civil society need resources to do their work. They survive mainly through donations — and increasingly through contractual arrangements with Governments or donors — which means that they depend on the good will of families, private enterprises, Governments and international organizations for resources to support their activities. Increasingly, the organizations of civil society are expected to be self-supporting and, to survive, some have ventured into income-generating activities or implemented donor-generated programmes and projects. This creates a dilemma for many organizations between pursuing social objectives and pursuing financing to continue to exist. Governments, with their power to legislate, can facilitate the transfer of resources to the third sector.

60. For the three sectors to work together to reduce vulnerability requires, first, an identification of the causes of vulnerability at the community level. Organizations of civil society are particularly well placed to accomplish this task: they are everywhere. As the nature of the risks and the specific population or group concerned are identified, it will be possible to work together to establish specific policies to diminish those risks. Depending on the nature of the risks, each community will have a specific profile of vulnerability, and the three sectors can work together to design an appropriate strategy. Thus, the nature of the problem will define the degree to which each sector will contribute to its solution. The nature of the problem will also define the level at which programmes will be formulated, implemented and financed, and establish responsibility for who is to finance what.

61. Development is a social responsibility. Government, the private sector and civil society share this social responsibility. It must, however, be noted that sometimes governments wish to realize their direct contribution to poverty eradication and social development in isolation. There are instances where governments do not make budgetary provision to assist non-governmental and other organizations of civil society to carry out their social development agendas. In fact, most governments do not need to allocate tax-payer money to these organizations. All that governments need to do is to pave the way for them to raise their own funds. Some governments adopt practices which are essentially antagonistic to non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations (practices which are often denied in public). This is particularly the case when it comes to the utilization of funds from international non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies.

62. Finally, it is necessary to identify at the local level all organizations (governmental, private sector, civil society and international) that are working to the improve the human condition. Information is vital, for it provides an important instrument to reduce vulnerability. People often do not know the organizational support available to them.

6. Prevention and promotional measures

63. While each person is potentially at risk, a number of factors determine whether people are able to steer clear of or are pushed into unfavourable situations. These may be classified as underlying, or predisposing, factors and enabling factors. How potential risk translates into actual outcome is the result of both the underlying and the enabling factors.

64. A premature birth, for instance, is the underlying factor, or predisposition, to impairment. If, however, good post-natal care, including services for infancy and early childhood, is available, impairment very likely will not result. Conversely, the lack of good pre-natal care or services for infancy and early childhood would be the enabling factor causing impairment. Both the underlying factor and the enabling factor are, in certain situations and to an extent, preventable. Therefore, prevention and promotional measures should be given primary importance in any strategy to counteract vulnerability.

65. There are three levels of prevention and promotional measures:

(a) First-level prevention addresses the underlying factor (Good pre-natal care is a prevention measure taken to reduce the occurrence of prematurity.);

(b) Second-level prevention addresses both the underlying and the enabling factors (Good post-natal care, infant care and early childhood care are prevention measures taken against the consequences of the underlying factor, prematurity.);

(c) Third-level prevention addresses the consequences of the underlying factor (Steps are taken to prevent the premature baby or child from becoming disabled.).

Family and community-based approaches

66. The first-level prevention and promotional measures can be implemented at the family and community level, normally through existing organizations. Social extension and awareness campaigns may be necessary to make individuals, groups and the community aware of the risks faced by various members and of the potential that exists within the local community to provide protection against those risks.

67. A community-development approach has proved successful in a number of countries. It has emphasized extension services and awareness campaigns, training of local workers and the provision of field supervisors from relevant governmental development agencies.

Network and referral systems

68. In order to provide ready access to more advanced and specialized technical and human resources and to financial support, network and referral systems are particularly useful. Such systems comprise components from the broader civil society and governmental agencies and typically involve the next highest level of public administration — for instance, the subdistrict or submunicipal level. Facilitating organizations from the broader civil society (those with different backgrounds — i.e., cultural, religious, ethnic), and specialized agencies of local government could best be utilized to support such network and referral systems.

Integration and mainstreaming

69. As mentioned above, government, the private sector and civil society are in the process of transforming or redefining their respective roles in the community. These three primary development actors are now realizing their additional mission in coping with the increasing vulnerability of the community. Coordination among the three actors has to be promoted. The best way to implement the integrated and mainstreaming approach is to start at the micro and community level. The model could gradually be extended and promoted, once there was evidence of its success.

C. Examples

70. Members of the expert workshop provided examples, drawn from their experience, of policies or programmes that serve to reduce vulnerability. These examples illustrate the kinds of actions governments might consider.

1. Youth Training and Employment Partnership Programme

71. This programme, undertaken in Trinidad and Tobago, represents a partnership of the Government, the private sector, individuals and communities. Partially funded by the World Bank, it is a governmental response to the situation of increasing unemployment in the country, particularly among young people. It targets unemployed, out-of-school youth between the ages of 15 and 30.

72. The programme model includes a series of activities: motivational training; career enhancement; vocational skills training; work experience; and entrepreneurial support training.

2. A mechanism for the development of appropriate policies

73. In the Latin America and Caribbean region, a strategy for the design and development of policies was developed under the direction of the Inter-American Children's Institute and the Inter-American Federation of Inclusion International. The strategy is currently being put into practice in several countries, including Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador. Particular attention is given to specific policies for education or general social policies.

74. The strategy involves the creation of policy-making groups composed of governmental officials, professionals, and representatives of non-governmental organizations, private-sector firms and intergovernmental organizations. The aim of the groups is to identify needs and problems, to determine priorities, strategies and actions, and to implement programmes and evaluate them. The focus is on strengthening community-based, decentralized strategies that allow for the participation of different actors of society. A framework based on human rights and inclusion is used.

75. The model includes components for training and planning, undertaking research and providing information to individuals, communities and society at large. It involves coordination within and among different sectors as well as among different institutions and articulation at both national and international levels.

76. Different actors participate in community development, training and policy planning activities. The research component, conducted by professional researchers who work with the targeted community or group, involves gathering and analysing information on needs, obstacles, existing legislation, data, policies, plans and services. It then identifies where risks for vulnerability or discrimination may exist or where additional information may be needed for focusing programme priorities. All the actors involved thus participate in the reform of legislation, policies and programmes. A system for managing information and a bibliographic information programme have been developed, and a network has been established at the regional and international levels to support different aspects of the process.

77. A component has been created to ensure continuous evaluation and monitoring of the implementation of the strategies.

3. Economic status and vulnerability

78. Botswana, a country which, at independence, was one of the poorest and least developed in the world, has established a shining example of democracy and created an economic miracle. With the discovery of diamonds during the post-independence period, development initiatives were accelerated. The Government invested heavily in the development of the economy and in the lives of its people. Education, health, access to safe drinking water, and agricultural and infrastructural development were given priority, and the results were marked and commendable improvements throughout the country. Diamonds and beef became and remain the leading exports of Botswana; earnings have contributed markedly to the country's foreign reserves and raised per capita income. Unlike most developing nations, Botswana has an insignificant debt burden.

79. Largely because, at independence, the country opted for a fast-paced development process, it now finds itself with an insufficiently developed human resource base. The educational system did not pay due attention to the changing needs of the economy and has done a disappointing job of preparing young people for the job market. Because the Government was from the outset the driving force behind development initiatives, many rural communities continue to look to it to "bring development" to them. The approach to rural development has been top-down and has disempowered many communities, since they have come to expect that responsibility for development rests with the Government. At the same time, the Government has expended a significant proportion of national resources on policies and programmes to enhance rural development. The impact of these policies and programmes has been illuminating not because of their success (unfortunately) but because of their failure to foster sustainable rural development and improve the quality of life of the majority of people. Income disparity is very high, and the biggest challenge for government and civil society is to address rural poverty.

80. The lesson from Botswana is that people's active participation in the economy is paramount in shaping and influencing their lives. The economic position of individuals, nations, communities, economic sectors and regions can be important determinants of their vulnerability. Individuals and groups need to understand in simple and basic terms what economics is all about, how to manage money, and how the marketing chain functions. Trade communities need information and knowledge on how they fit into the larger economic picture and strategies to promote local (community-level) economic development. Policies and

programmes that facilitate processes and interventions at the community level are needed to assist members, to understand the changes that are taking place around them and to take steps to reduce vulnerability through informed decision-making.

4. A model for promoting youth self-employment at the village level

81. In Indonesia, a greater number of young people remain uneducated or drop out of school than graduate. Those who leave school often find it extremely difficult to obtain employment. In order to reduce unemployment among young people, it was decided to try to encourage development of their entrepreneurial and self-employment capacities. Programmes were designed in various localities and villages. The establishment of *Karang Taruna* (Platform for Youth) clubs in 70,000 villages has been successful in developing self-employment among youth. Young people are provided with vocational training in animal husbandry, mixed farming and handicrafts. The embryos of microbusinesses are also established at the village level, under the supervision of field social workers. The microbusiness is integrated into the village cooperative, which provides support for the marketing of the products. The best performing *Karang Taruna* members from each province are invited by the President to attend the national day commemoration at the Presidential Palace. This has encouraged a spirit of competition among youth club members.

5. A model of community-based rehabilitation services for people with disabilities

82. A model which promotes decentralized, community-based responsibility and involvement in the rehabilitation of people with disabilities has been developed in many countries. It contains the following components:

(a) Training for the indigenous community development cadres and vocational training for the disabled, conducted at the village level;

(b) Establishment by the trainers of their respective "small business group" of people with disabilities;

(c) Coordination and assistance to the "small business groups", provided by a community-based sheltered workshop which is established at the subdistrict level;

(d) A mobile rehabilitation team, also established at the provincial level, which is available to provide additional rehabilitation and vocational services at the village and subdistrict levels, as required;

(e) Provincial rehabilitation centres, established to provide referral services required by people with disabilities from the villages.

D. Reducing vulnerability through enhanced employment opportunities for groups and persons with specific needs

83. Employment creation is an essential component of any policy or programme that addresses poverty and aims to achieve social integration. The goal is the creation of freely chosen and productive employment. The role of self-managed enterprises, micro-enterprises and the informal sector requires emphasis and should be seriously considered in strategies aimed at promoting employment and sustainable livelihoods, particularly in efforts to reduce vulnerability.

84. Reduction of vulnerability through enhanced employment opportunities requires both policy reform and direct targeted programmes. Direct interventions ensure effective outreach and implementation of policy decisions. While they can directly improve the worst manifestations of vulnerability, they can help to bring about necessary enhancement of the capabilities of the vulnerable groups. On the other hand, major policy and institutional reforms are often required in order to ensure that direct programmes achieve their objectives on a sufficiently large and meaningful scale. Areas in which special attention and action are needed are described below:

(a) For women, it is important to promote an overall environment of non-discrimination; to improve access to land and other assets, including financial resources and access to credit for business enterprises, in particular; to improve the human resource base; to expand access to wage employment opportunities; and to extend social protection and improve conditions of work in unregulated and unprotected jobs. It is also important to strengthen organizational and negotiating capacities;

(b) For workers in the informal sector, it is important to create an enabling environment for a healthy growth of the informal sector. This entails conducive macro and sectoral policies as well as a transparent and simple regulatory framework. It is also vital to arrange for the provision of necessary infrastructure; to improve access to credit, improved technology and markets; to provide extension services geared towards improving product design and quality of goods produced; and to provide support services for improved linkages with other sectors of the economy;

(c) For people with disabilities, it is important to ensure respect of equal rights, the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities and the encouragement of a supportive social and physical environment; to ensure integration of the disabled in education, training, employment and society in general; to ensure that training and preparation for work are more responsive to the needs of employers and labour markets; and to undertake promotional measures required if the potential of new technologies and new assistive devices is to be realized. Because of the degree of vulnerability which can result from disability, additional policies should be considered to encourage alternative work arrangements that reasonably accommodate the needs of people with disabilities and ensure that they are able to work according to their individual abilities. It is essential to ensure that laws do not discriminate against people with disabilities; create conditions whereby neither an employer nor an employee with disabilities will suffer undue financial disadvantages from an employment contract; and prepare policies that enlarge training possibilities in order to enhance their participation in employment.

IV. Tools and priorities for follow-up

85. Development needs to be pursued by a mix of social, cultural and economic policies. Broad participation by all the actors in society to formulate and implement those policies is necessary. All this must of course be done in a coordinated and orderly manner in which functions and responsibilities are clearly identified and the means of coordination adequately set out. For this, some institutionalization of the cooperation may be useful, at least through the establishment of procedures for periodic consultations and exchange of information among the three main actors: the government, the private sector and organizations of civil society.

86. If the negative consequences of vulnerability are largely the outcome of the way in which people and governments behave, they can be reduced or eliminated by changed behaviour on the part of people and governments. While the global community encompasses such a breadth of circumstance that universal prescriptions need to be treated with caution, there are, nevertheless, certain courses of action which governments should consider, in order to see if they might be applicable to their situations.

A. An enabling environment for reducing vulnerability

87. There is an urgent need for countries to formulate policies and implement programmes that recognize and redress the existence of vulnerability in different social, economic and political relationships. Ultimately, such policies and programmes can help not also to reduce vulnerability but also to promote social integration and bring about a more just society for all people. This can be done through actions such as:

(a) Assessing the nature and extent of vulnerability in each country. Accurate assessments of situations is a precondition for effective policy and programme interventions;

(b) Ensuring that a primary concern of legislation, criminal justice systems and social services is to reduce the incidence of violence against groups and people who are disadvantaged or at risk;

(c) Creating an environment in which cooperative and other people's organizations can be created and ensuring the support system that can strengthen the capacity of such organizations to adopt wider developmental roles;

(d) Promoting the establishment of democratic, transparent and accountable organizations at the community level;

(e) Promoting the sharing of experiences among community organizations with regard to successful socio-economic projects, especially those which result in reduced vulnerability;

(f) Compiling the relevant information and making it easily available would contribute. It should be possible to create an easy-to-use directory of all the organizations working to support vulnerable people, to help them reduce their vulnerability at relatively low cost;

(g) Promoting empowerment processes at the local level and developing projects that have as components income and employment creation, development and strengthening of community organizations, sustainable utilization of resources, and assertiveness or empowerment for vulnerable groups;

(h) Strengthen the ability of communities to negotiate social contracts with governments, indicating the roles and responsibilities of different development actors and those of the community;

(i) Formulating policies that provide a framework for the work of non-governmental organizations; making

resources available for non-governmental organization work without excessive control or regulation;

(j) Encouraging non-governmental organizations to develop, through broad consultation, a "code of conduct" or what constitutes good practice for them to operate by.

88. Governments should make provision for funding from international and United Nations sources to their national development plans, including support for non-governmental organizations. These must be recognized officially for their beneficial role in areas where government may lack capacity to reach people and promote development. This is often the case in remote, rural settings and at local and community levels. Non-governmental organizations should be empowered to raise external funding, via governmental mechanisms and the private sector, where possible.

89. Countries may further reduce vulnerability by increasing awareness, participation and solidarity through such means as:

(a) Simplifying documents (or providing simplified versions of documents, such as constitutions, national development plans and other documents of relevance to ordinary people) and translating them into local languages so that people can understand national issues and make informed decisions. Radio, television, documentaries and dramas can be used to this end, as can any of the new forms of electronic communication and information dissemination. Debates with wide public participation could be promoted in communities on various issues confronting or challenging the nation;

(b) Reviewing laws, policies and practices that discriminate against particular groups or in any other way increase vulnerability, through broad consultation and research into the concerns and needs of those people and groups;

(c) Highlighting the important role and contribution of all people and groups in national development, history and culture;

(d) Facilitating processes whereby ordinary people understand the link between participation (be it in the development debate, voting or in other ways) and the betterment of their conditions;

(e) Making resources available for cultural events that promote social understanding and a spirit of togetherness and cooperation among diverse groups of people.

90. In developing and implementing policies, programmes and activities, respect should be accorded to indigenous knowledge, traditions and coping strategies. Culturally appropriate curricula should be developed, taking into account people's language, culture, seasonal movements and other factors. International sources of funding should support locally created radio and television programmes which utilize and promote traditional cultural solutions to national problems. Communities should be guaranteed full access to their own community resources, and communities should be able to benefit directly from the resources they have traditionally relied upon without unnecessary restriction.

91. To ensure their welfare, people need both employment opportunities and the protection offered by a comprehensive social security system designed to cover various risks. A number of factors — including low levels of productivity, high rates of unemployment and an insufficient tax base — can create difficulties for countries seeking to establish a sufficient social security system. Some countries face difficulties in sustaining existing systems and the level of support they provide. To prevent and diminish multiple vulnerabilities, it is important for all countries to work to develop sustainable and comprehensive systems to provide universally a basic level of social security.

92. Finally, an enabling environment to reduce vulnerability should recognize and value spiritual aspects of development. Policies and programmes should not seek to improve material conditions alone but should also allow for spiritual development.

B. Adopting a long-term strategic approach

93. Borrowing from the Gender and Development (GAD) approach, which focuses on meeting practical gender-ascribed needs in the immediate term, while working to achieve strategic interests to transform unequal relations between women and men in the longer term, policies and programmes designed to reduce risk, vulnerability and disadvantage should likewise adopt a two-pronged approach. It is important to recognize that many people at risk have immediate needs — often tied to survival — which must be met, even if by doing so their vulnerability is confirmed. Meeting the practical needs of people at risk should not be the ultimate aim of policies and programmes, however. They should always contain a component which seeks to remedy the conditions of disadvantage, discrimination, exploitation or exclusion which caused the vulnerability in the first place.

C. Increasing empathy

94. Reducing vulnerability will require more than programmes that seek to reduce risk. It is also important to increase social solidarity by creating opportunities that make it easier for people to empathize with the situations of others and to respond positively to those situations. There are a number of ways in which people have, over the centuries, erected obstacles that diminish the ability to feel empathy. None of those obstacles is inevitable, and policy initiatives to diminish or remove them are possible and would contribute significantly to diminishing the negative consequences of vulnerability. Some obstacles are listed below, followed by suggested policy responses:

(a) Reluctance to express empathy for the "wrong" person or group, and fear of the unfamiliar or different. The suggested policy responses are to provide information and opportunities for different groups to learn about others and to interact with them. Efforts should be made to ensure that young people, in particular, grow up aware of the situation of those who come from different backgrounds or who are less fortunate than themselves; wherever possible, direct contact between individuals or groups with differences should be encouraged. This could include, for example, educational programmes about disability for everybody, integrating educational and other facilities for children with additional requirements into the mainstream, and mixed tenure housing schemes in which people in different situations of vulnerability live alongside those not in those situations;

(b) The fact that there are limits to the empathy that most people are prepared to demonstrate, particularly if they are called upon to make personal, financial or career sacrifices. The suggested policy response is to develop greater incentives for empathy, including tax incentives and allowing employees time off for voluntary activities, and to ensure that caring programmes recognize the efforts of the care giver by meeting her or his legitimate expenses;

(c) The fact that — in most societies — gender stereotypes have resulted in situations whereby occupations associated with professional caring have most often been considered as female, often resulting in under-valuation of their importance and remuneration. The suggested policy response is to promote greater reflection about the relative importance of "socially useful work", to raise pay standards accordingly and to encourage both young men and young women to consider such career paths. It may be necessary to increase opportunities for young men to undergo training which emphasizes empathy and caring and diminishes traditional stereotypes of masculinity;

(d) The tendency for institutions designed to care for individuals and groups at risk — and the people who work in them — to become bureaucratized, causing them to focus more on the needs and interests of the institution than on those of the people needing care. The suggested policy response is to introduce (where they do not already exist) regular periodic institutional audits to check that concern for the needs of the clients remains paramount. Such audits must involve representatives of those receiving care.

D. Mechanisms for partnership

95. It is important to encourage the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate partnerships between government, the private sector and organizations of civil society. Such mechanisms should provide a forum for all three sectors to come together to discuss relevant issues and development responses to current concerns. Each sector should contribute in areas where it has a demonstrated advantage. Government continues to wield major responsibility for the well being of society and for setting national development goals; organizations of civil society offer an opportunity for people to participate and to channel their efforts in an organized manner. The private sector should be encouraged to recognize that its responsibilities towards achieving a society for all go beyond activities motivated solely by profit, and its more active involvement in efforts to reduce vulnerability should be sought, particularly with respect to providing technical assistance; training; mentoring; information technology; credit assistance and market information to assist micro businesses.

96. Although partnerships between government, the private sector and civil society can yield positive results, caution should be exercised, since the power relations within and among the different sectors are unequal. All partnerships must value equality, transparency and attainment of a common goal.

97. Partnerships could also extend beyond national boundaries, to include subregional and regional alliances designed to make the implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes more feasible, particularly at times when the causes of vulnerability or disadvantage are supranational in origin or where combined efforts are needed to respond to global threats. Such alliances could help to facilitate the sharing of positive experience.

98. International support and encouragement for greater collaboration among governments, the private sector and civil society, including non-governmental organizations, could have a significant impact in reducing vulnerability. This support could be demonstrated, in the first instance, through allowing increased participation by non-governmental organizations and other organizations of civil society in the activities and forums of international organizations.

99. The Commission for Social Development should consider establishing and promoting an international network of organizations, experts and individuals who have participated in different aspects of the process of the World Summit for Social Development and implementation of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action,[1] in order to provide a permanent, informal mechanism for the exchange of information and experiences and encouraging involvement in the further implementation of strategic actions. Consideration should be given to the potential offered via the Internet.

E. Reconsidering resource issues

100. Much of what is here proposed will be seen to have resource implications. But it would be easy to overestimate them. First, resources spent today may often lead to long-term savings. For instance, money spent on effective youth employment initiatives will add to the ranks of taxpayers and hence tax revenue to the State, not to mention the potential long-term savings if the likelihood that they would engage in criminal activity goes down. It is essential for States to develop accounting tools that enable them to look at social investment and dividends over a longer period of time than the traditional tax or accounting year. The Commission for Social Development might wish to initiate work to develop mechanisms of accounting appropriate to judging the actual return on social investment.

101. Secondly, expenditure under one heading may at times bring returns that more than compensate under another. For instance, it has been suggested that vulnerable families and young people in many cities would be much assisted were they able to travel free of charge on public transport. This would clearly cost money under one heading, but depending on the circumstances, the city economy is likely to benefit from an increased number of family visits to local shops, places of entertainment or education.

102. Thirdly, formal recognition should be given to unpaid work and socially useful work — most of it done by women — and to voluntary activities — much of it undertaken through organizations of civil society. This would lead to better awareness and appreciation of those important activities and to more accurate reflection of the distribution of work in an economy. It would also create a more thorough understanding of how the need or the desire to meet social responsibilities can have an effect on people's vulnerability and thus provide an invaluable tool to policy makers. Recognition would be more readily forthcoming if those kinds of work were properly recorded in national accounts and the gross national product. The Commission for Social Development may wish to consider how methodological work that is being undertaken to this end could best be supported.

F. Social impact assessments

103. To a large extent, policies and programmes operate retrospectively — seeking to ameliorate the consequences of vulnerability that have already come to pass. It would be better for governments and for people at risk to prevent negative consequences before they occur and to replace palliative measures by positive initiatives. In order to do this, greater awareness of the causes and consequences of vulnerability is needed, among policy makers and by the public at large. One way to raise awareness is to undertake "social impact assessments" of new draft legislation, policies and programmes before they take effect. Mechanisms should be created to examine draft legislation and other major policy initiatives at an early stage, to predict and assess their impact — whether positive or negative — for women, various groups and people at risk. Those directly affected (and in certain cases those closest to them, whether as families or care givers) must participate in the process of evaluation. This participation may be best achieved through the involvement of organizations of civil society with specialist knowledge.

104. Those making social impact assessments should begin by gathering information about, and providing analysis of, current conditions for people exposed to different types of risk. This is important for two reasons: in many places analyses based on social considerations and outcomes are rarely made; and it is important to have an understanding of the current situation to be able to evaluate the impact of future policy or programme implementation.

105. Social impact assessments should include social and cultural analyses, which permit an understanding of cultural dynamics, and the translation of this understanding for use by decision makers. Parallel gender-based analyses (and training) should be applied to all policies. The Commission

for Social Development may wish to support the systematic development of a methodology for undertaking social impact analyses.

G. Network poverty

106. It is commonplace to note that people in vulnerable situations should be involved in drawing attention to their circumstances and promoting public awareness of their specific needs. This principle should be endorsed, but with an important rider: recent research suggests that there are situations in which vulnerable people need to connect with people in less vulnerable situations, since it is the latter who often have the contacts and means to assist them. For instance, if the training and support of young people without jobs is carried out in a situation in which they simply relate to each other, then there is evidence to suggest that a culture of unemployment is reinforced and that their chance of finding a job is reduced — whereas if they are enabled to meet people with good contacts, then there is a better chance that they will find employment. The concept "network poverty" has been coined to describe a situation in which vulnerable people lack connections to people less vulnerable than they.

107. Governments should take practical policy initiatives to ensure that the strength and dignity that vulnerable people may find from linking with one another and the intimate knowledge of their challenges and their own effective coping strategies are matched by the practical help that may be available through wider networking.

H. Reducing vulnerability by promoting peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts

108. Everyone who lives under conditions of conflict and war is vulnerable. To reduce vulnerability it is essential to reduce conflict and to support mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of differences, both within and between countries. Important measures include informational programmes to promote greater understanding of peacekeeping issues and the training of law enforcement and military personnel to prevent violence against people at risk and to promote respect for their rights.

109. It is also important to curtail the production of and trade in weaponry. The United Nations could set standards for the amounts of money spent on military expenditures and encourage greater investments in people, bearing in mind that at the World Summit for Social Development, Heads of State and Government committed themselves to "undertake to explore new ways of generating new public and private financial resources, *inter alia*, through the appropriate reduction of excessive military expenditures, including global military expenditures and the arms trade, and investments for arms production and acquisition, taking into consideration national security requirements, so as to allow possible allocation of additional funds for social and economic development".[2] The reduction of the debt burden of developing countries in favour of social priorities is also of major importance.

110. In a world dominated by powerful economic and political interests, issues of vulnerability and disadvantage are rarely raised. Many policies designed with economic or financial considerations at their core have — at least in the medium term — threatened social and economic development in many countries and thereby increased vulnerability. Vulnerable national economies contribute to increasing vulnerability among all citizens but particularly for individuals and groups at risk within those countries. Such conditions exist for some people in all countries, yet those people are rarely heard. To hear the voices of the weak requires patience, awareness, sensitivity and a willingness to reach out. It is the responsibility of the powerful, the "advantaged", the people who think they are invincible in society to work to reduce vulnerability and disadvantage. Ultimately, the measure of any society rests in its success in recognizing and combating its own inequalities. If development is a social concept and if human beings are at the centre of concern, it can be no other way.

Notes

[1] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution I, annex I, Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, and annex II, Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.

[2] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution I, annex I, commitment 9.

Annex

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